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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY
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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA, DRL/ILCSR FOR MITTELHAUSER, G/TIP FOR
STEINER; DOL/ILAB FOR RIGBY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [EIND](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: FORCED LABOR AND CHILD LABOR IN THE PRODUCTION OF
GOODS

REF: STATE 43120

¶1. Summary: The sectors of the Syrian economy that are involved in the production of goods are agriculture, petroleum, textiles, pharmaceuticals and refined food products. In 2007, fuel oil accounted for roughly 70 percent of Syria's USD 110 million in exports to the U.S., with the remaining 30 percent consisting of textiles, garments, handicrafts, spices, teas and apricot paste. Due to the rising cost of living, poor families have an increasing incentive for seeking to illegally employ children to satisfy substitute needs. The Syrian Labor Law purports to provide for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace. Technically, parental permission is required for children under age 16 to work, and the minimum age for private sector employment in non-physical labor is 15. In practice, however, this law is neither vigorously enforced nor respected. Due to the strained bilateral relationship and notoriously inaccurate Syrian government statistics, Post cannot obtain exact labor statistics from the host government. End summary.

No Known Exploitative Labor in Production of Goods

¶2. The majority of children that work in a good-producing industry in Syria do so informally without remuneration. Most children under age 16 who work do so for the parents in the agricultural sector. It is also common for Syrian fathers to arrange unpaid "internships" for their teenage sons to acquire practical skills and experience by working in factories owned by the fathers' friends. There have been no publicly reported incidences of either exploitative child or forced labor in the production of goods, although a report by the Arab Council for Childhood and Development estimated the total number of Syrian children who performed "tough jobs in unhealthy working conditions" at over 600,000.

Government Institutions Addressing Exploitative Labor

¶3. The Syrian Labor Law is the basis for preventing the exploitation of children in the workplace. The law states that the minimum age of private-sector employment is 15 for non-physical labor, and 18 for heavy labor. Parental permission is required to employ children aged 16 or below. According to the law, wage-earning child employees may work a maximum of six hours per day, and are not permitted to work night shifts, weekends or holidays. However, those children working for family businesses and who are technically not paid a salary -- a common occurrence -- do not fall under this law. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has the responsibility for monitoring employment conditions for

workers under age 18. Within the ministry, the Labor Inspection Department is charged with enforcing the labor law by conducting unannounced spot checks at work sites, but the frequency and scope of these checks is unknown. In December 2006, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs stated that most Syrian children who work do so seasonally and for a limited amount of time.

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